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NOTES ON THE KATHIRI STATE OF HADHRAMAUT

R. H. Smith

DURING THE SIX YEARS since the sunset of imperial rule in India, new light has been shed on all but one of the former appendages of that rule in the adjacent Arabian peninsula. Though Kuwait, Bahrein and Oman have long enjoyed a certain "international status" entitling them to a delineation of their boundaries on maps of the Middle East, their most recent and widespread fame derives from their new status as repositories of a multi-billion dollar oil investment. Consequently, vital statistics relating to these three states are a fingertip proposition in many reference rooms in the country.

But the states of the Aden Protectorate — where as yet no petroleum has been discovered — remain the victims of such complete anonymity that most maps are utterly vacant of even the sketchiest political detail concerning them. Moreover, they receive only scant mention in the more specialized political handbooks. Yet in area and population, the Aden Protectorate equals Kuwait, Bahrein and Oman combined, while her cultural and social characteristics, especially in Hadhramaut, indicate a far higher development than can be found in most shaykhdoms of the Persian Gulf.

Most remarkable of the Aden sultanates, because of the paradox of its geographical remoteness, yet high degree of cosmopolitanism, is the Kathiri State, whose capital, Seiyun, is probably the loveliest purely native city in the entire Arab World. Here, too, is paradox, for, though Seiyun lies on the bottom of the parched Wadi Hadhramaut, it is famous for its many palace gardens and for such unheard-of desert luxuries as swimming

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pools built by the rich and progressive class of Seyyeds, whose many innovations have re-made the face of this ancient land of the Queen of Sheba.

The political frontiers of the Kathiri State describe a finger pointed downward from the Rub-al-Khali into the heart of Hadhramaut. They enclose an area of some six thousand square miles and a population of sixty thousand, a third of whom dwell in the city of Seiyun. The state's current average annual revenue runs close to $100,000.[1]

Early Kathiri history is obscure. Forebears of the present sultan once controlled all of Hadhramaut, but in the eighteenth century the al-Quaiti, an immigrant tribe of Yemeni origin, wrested control of the coastal region from their Kathiri overlords at Seiyun and gradually established hegemony over interior tribes until today the Quaiti State comprises nearly the whole of Hadhramaut. Until the "Peace of Ingrams,"[2] modern Kathiri history was dominated by constant and costly warfare between Seiyun and the parvenu Quaiti power at Mukalla.

The present Kathiri ruler, His Highness Sultan Husayn Ali Ibn Mansur, succeeded to the throne on May 22, 1950, and was one of the five Aden chiefs selected to attend the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth.[3] It is through Sultan Husayn's generous and patient correspondence that much of this statistical information concerning his far-off land has been gathered.

Political organization in the Kathiri State is patterned closely after administrative machinery in Malaya.[4] Executive authority is vested in the sultan assisted by a Council of State of which the ruler is president and the British Resident an ex-officio member. The Council's remaining members include: the Kathiri State Secretary (*Wazir*) and heads of the departments of the Treasury, Customs, Education and Judiciary, in addition to four un-

[1] In 1951 the East African shilling, worth about $0.14, replaced the Indian rupee as legal tender in the Protectorate.

[2] William Harold Ingrams, last of the old-style empire-builders, did much to pacify and organise modern Hadhramaut in the years 1934–44. He was the first Resident Adviser to the states of Hadhramaut and the Eastern Aden Protectorate. To him, Hadhramis have given the name, "Peace-maker of the Desert."

[3] Others invited: the sultans of Mukalla, Lahej, Shuqra and the Amir of Dhala, the latter three, prominent chiefs of the Western Aden Protectorate.

[4] Ingrams visited Singapore in 1940 to study the operation of local governments in the Malay States for ways of stepping-up efficiency in native rule in the Hadhramaut.

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official members serving as consultative representatives of the "popular will."

Senior state servants include: a Chief Medical Officer, who exercises control over the Government Hospital at Seiyun, as well as the al-Kaf Charity Hospital at Terim, and government dispensaries elsewhere in the state; a Passport Officer, charged with regulating the sizable flow of traffic in and out of the state, especially during the yearly Mecca pilgrimage; a Postmaster; Chief Accountant and Wireless and Telegraph Officer. Town Councils provide the benefits of local government in Seiyun, Terim, Hauta and fourteen other municipalities and villages throughout the state. District Commissioners administer the two chief provinces, Terim and Hauta.

The Kathiri government provides well organized public services consisting of a civil police, in addition to the Kathiri Armed Constabulary, free medical attention and a network of educational facilities embracing the Secondary School for Boys at Seiyun, the al-Kaf School for Girls at Terim and eleven lesser primary institutions with a total enrollment of three thousand. The state engages the services of a staff of forty-five teachers. Several students have studied in Syria, Egypt and Iraq through scholarships provided by the Kathiri government.

In addition to efficient internal control, the sultan lays claim, as well, to many symbols of outward sovereignty, such as the state's own postage stamps[5] and coinage,[6] a coat-of-arms, national flag and, choicest of all, a gun salute.[7]

A more sober assessment of his "independence," however, appears in the provisions of the 1918 and 1939 treaty engagements[8] entered into between the sultan's predecessors and the British government, whereby the Kathiri State is defined as being in *subordinate* political relationship with Britian in a manner simi-

[5] These issues, beautifully engraved, appeared in 1942 and 1946.

[6] In 1897 coins were ordered struck at the mint in Birmingham, England, by Al-Kaf & Co., of Singapore, for the use of their Hadhrami kinsmen in Terim.

[7] Nine guns. Only two Aden chiefs are entitled to more, Lahej and Mukalla, who are honored by eleven salvos fired from British batteries whenever these chiefs enter or leave the territory of Aden Colony.

[8] The Anglo-Kathiri treaty engagement of 1918 was merely an extension of the terms of a previous Anglo-Quaiti treaty to those parts of the Hadhramaut interior controlled by the Kathiri sultan. By terms of the Anglo-Kathiri agreement the Kathiri State was placed under British protectorate. The 1939 Adviser Agreement provided for the appointment of a British Resident Adviser to the court of the Kathiri sultan.

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lar to that of the old Non-Federated Malay States, though the sultan retains full civil and criminal jurisdiction over his own subjects. But, as in the case of the Malay rulers, the Kathiri sultan is treaty bound to accept the counsel of the British Resident Adviser in all matters save those affecting Muslim tradition or custom. Also, the state is prohibited from entering into correspondence with any foreign government or any other Aden Protectorate state without approval of the British government. In return for these pledges, Great Britain has undertaken full responsibility for the defense of the state and for the maintenance of the sultan's paramountcy over his own tribes.

That both internal and external characteristics of the Kathiri State should borrow heavily from existing institutions in Malaya is not surprising, since for many generations extensive social and commercial ties have bound these two widely separated regions

TABLE OF STATISTICS, STATES OF THE ADEN PROTECTORATE

State	Title of ruler	Population	Area in sq. miles	Annual revenue	Police	Salute
Qu'aiti (Mukalla) ..	H.H. the Sultan of	197,000	30,000	Rs 27,50,078	Unlisted	11 guns
Kathiri (Seiyun) ...	Sultan of	60,000	6,000	Rs 4,80,000	Unlisted	9 guns
Wahidi (Balhaf)	Sultan of	25,000	5,000	Rs 1,02,448	Unlisted	None
Mahri (Socotra & Qishn)	Sultan of	22,000	13,000	Unlisted	Unlisted	9 guns
Haura	Shaykh of	300	Unlisted	Unlisted	Unlisted	None
'Irqa	Shaykh of	350	Unlisted	Unlisted	Unlisted	None
Abdali (Lahej)	H.H. the Sultan of	41,400	4,500	Unlisted	380	11 guns
Fadhli (Shuqra)	Sultan of	25,000	2,500	Rs 4,17,697	120	9 guns
Amiri (Dhala)	Amir of	27,000	1,050	Rs 1,50,000	75	9 guns
Lower Yafa'i (Al Qara)	Sultan of	23,000	700	Rs 1,65,000	30	9 guns
Upper Yafa'i (Mahjaba)	Sultan of	89,000	900	Unlisted	Unlisted	None
Lower 'Aulaqi (Ahwar)	Sultan of	12,000	2,500	Rs 49,000	40	None
Upper 'Aulaqi (Nisab)	Sultan of	53,000	1,800	Unlisted	Unlisted	None
Beihan (Beihan Qasb)	Amir of	13,000	4,000	Unlisted	40	None
Audhali (Lodar)	Sultan of	10,000	1,000	Unlisted	30	None
Haushabi (Museimir)	Sultan of	10,000	350	Unlisted	29	None
Alawi (Al Qash'a) ..	Shaykh of	1,200	89	Unlisted	Unlisted	None
Aqrabi (Bir Ahmed).	Shaykh of	2,000	101	Unlisted	Unlisted	None

Area & population figures from: *Columbia Lippincott Gazetteer of the World*, 1952.
Revenue & police figures from: *Aden Colonial Report*, 1949 & 1950.
Data on gun salutes from: W. H. Ingrams in conversation with the author.

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together. Kathiri economy is almost wholly dependent on funds remitted to Seiyun and Terim from extensive Far East business holdings of great Kathiri families like the House of al-Kaf. Over a century ago, branches of these families emigrated to Singapore and Java in search of happier livelihoods than those provided in their own infertile homeland. Today, vast blocks of property in metropolitan Singapore and Jakarta are held by scions of these early Hadhrami entrepreneurs. Estimated revenue from such holdings has been put at $2,500,000 yearly.*

East Indian influences are by no means solely fiscal. Malay is virtually the court language at Seiyun and certainly the common tongue among the educated classes. The routine dress of a Kathiri gentleman is a high-collared tunic reminiscent of the Indian *sherwani* and worn over a sarong.

The most casual survey of this unlikely country would be incomplete without mention of that extraordinary old patriarch, Seyyed Sir Bubakr al-Kaf, K. B. E., present head of the al-Kaf family. If a whole country can be said to live under the shadow of one man's private charities, the Kathiri State is it, with Sir Bubakr the personification of the seignioral patron. Though in his seventies, he is still the dominating personality of the Hadhramaut and his millions the source of much of its prosperity. In 1937, he built the first motorable road from Shihr, on the Hadhramaut coast inland to Terim, a distance of a hundred miles, thus providing convenient egress over a route previously negotiable only by camel and requiring many days travel time. Today, Aden Airways Ltd., operates a regular plane service between Aden Colony and Hauta, in Kathiri territory. In addition, Sir Bubakr is responsible for much of the state's urban electrification, many of its medical services, schools and, yes, even cinemas. It is in large measure due to his efforts that the Kathiri State of Hadhramaut stands today on the threshold of the twentieth century.

* W. H. Ingrams, *Report on the Social, Economic and Political Conditions in the Hadhramaut.* London: Colonial Office, 1936.